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Nuclear Weapons Freeze Could Be Verified

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WASHINGTON—The dramatic decision last week by four former top U.S. officials to break publicly with the Reagan Administration's declared willingness to be the first to use nuclear weapons in the event of a conventional war in Europe is perhaps the most significant sign yet of the seriousness of the nuclear debate now sweeping Europe and America.

Dissenting from the Administration's policy—most recently articulated by Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr.—were Robert S. McNamara, secretary of defense in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations; McGeorge Bundy, national security adviser in the Kennedy Administration; George F. Kennan, former ambassador to the Soviet Union; and Gerard C. Smith, chairman of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency during the Nixon Administration.

The four men urged the Administration to renounce its "first-strike" policy. They called their proposal "imperative for the long-run survival of our society and, indeed, of civilization as we know it." Their proposal has focused even more attention on the call—heard on both sides of the Atlantic—for a nuclear weapons freeze and reductions.

The arguments against an immediate freeze are serious and ought not to be ignored. Opponents of the freeze argue that it would keep the United States in a position of inferiority vis-a-vis the Soviet Union; that a freeze now would remove any incentives for the Soviets to agree to reductions later; and that a freeze could not be satisfactorily verified. Do these objections stand up to careful scrutiny?

In his press conference on March 31, President Reagan claimed the "Soviets now have a definite margin of superiority over the United States." He added that the "Soviets' great edge is one in which they could absorb our retaliatory blow and hit us again."

But the President doesn't seem to realize that even if all our intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) are destroyed, we would still have 3,000 warheads at sea placed on invulnerable submarines and another 2,000 on bombers on alert status. Each of these warheads has an explosive force many times that of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. These can destroy military as well as industrial targets. They could contaminate hundreds of thousands of square miles with deadly radioactivity.

Much is made of an imbalance of strategic nuclear forces in Europe, ignoring that these are only a part of the overall deterrent. In the past, NATO quite wisely deployed untargetable submarine missiles—not land-based missiles—as a response to the Soviet intermediate range SS-20 missiles aimed at Europe. President Reagan is misinformed when he says we have nothing to counter the SS-20s. NATO has more than 400 Poseidon warheads assigned to its use and in addition more than

100 British and French submarine missiles. These are a better deterrent than the Pershing and cruise missiles because they cannot be destroyed by a Soviet strike.

Even though superiority is meaningless in a world of thousands of nuclear weapons, there is no question that the United States with its strategic forces is better off than the Soviet Union. Survivability is the key characteristic of a deterrent force, and the United States with its submarine missiles and bombers has fewer vulnerable weapons than do the Soviets. They place too much reliance on land-based missiles, which are now becoming theoretically vulnerable; their submarines can launch fewer warheads, are noisy, which makes them vulnerable to detection, and their intercontinental bombers are currently limited in numbers and date back to the mid-1950s.

A freeze today would not leave America in a dangerous position of inferiority; we would still be very strong. We would have 9,000 strategic warheads to the Soviet Union's 7,000.

The second argument, that a freeze now would remove Soviet incentives for reductions, is just another version of the old bargaining-chip theory—buy new weapons in order to blackmail the Soviets into halting their programs. It is an effective way of ensuring that weapons stockpiles increase; but it has proven ineffective in persuading the Soviets to exercise restraint.

A classic example of the failure of this policy is the deployment of MIRVs, the multiple warheads put on single missiles beginning in the early 1970s. The United States was about five years ahead of the Soviets in this technology, and rather than attempt to negotiate a halt to MIRV procurement, the United States decided to move ahead without any limitations. Henry Kissinger argued that this program was necessary to get the Soviets to back out of a MIRV race.

As might have been expected, the opposite occurred. The Soviets followed in our MIRV footsteps, first with tests, then with deployment of first-generation types and finally with sophisticated guidance systems. Now we see these as a major threat to our ICBMs. President Reagan becomes alarmed over a "window of vulnerability" brought on by the MIRVs, proposes to spend hundreds of billions of dollars as a response to this threat, and now says we can't freeze our nuclear programs until this imagined Soviet superiority is eliminated.

Finally, verification is the one issue that applies to all alternatives, a freeze at current levels, reductions and even continued buildups. Can we verify the size and characteristics of the Soviet strategic nuclear forces and can we be sure that reductions are actually being made?

First, it should be understood that satisfactory verification of an agreement to freeze or reduce nuclear weapons does not require that any violation, no matter how insignificant, has to have a high probability of detection as some who wish to foreclose any arms limitation would like the public to believe. When we have 2,000 strategic delivery vehicles, the secret Soviet production of 100 missiles is not a security risk. President Reagan's negotiator, Paul Nitze, has in the past testified

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